

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

TORUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 5353

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

AMEMBASSY PANAMA

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAGUA 0138

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, NU

SUBJECT: POST-ASSASSINATION RIOTING

REF: MANAGUA 0134 (NOTAL)

BEGIN SUMMARY: RIOTING ERUPTED IN MANAGUA DURING THE EVENING OF JANUARY 11 IN THE FORM OF SETTING FIRE TO PERHAPS AS MANY AS 25 PLANTS AND OFFICES, BURNING CARS AND BUSES, AND DRIVING AWAY FIRE-MEN. THE FIRST ENTERPRISE SET AFAIRE HAD BEEN UNDER A PRESS ATTACK AS A SOMOZA'S OWNED EXPLOITER OF POOR NICARAGUANS. FIRE BROKE OUT FOLLOWING THE PASSAGE OF LARGE CROWDS ACCOMPANYING THE CORPSE OF PEDRO JOAQUIN CHAMORRO WHICH WAS BEING CARRIED TO LA PRENSA, THE CHAMORRO FAMILY NEWSPAPER, FOR OVERNIGHT MOURNING. THE DISTURBANCES APPARENTLY WERE CONFINED TO ABOUT A ONE OR TWO-MILE STRETCH NEAR LA PRENSA. THERE WERE REPORTEDLY FEW INDIVIDUAL INJURIES. THE POLICE DID NOT MOVE IN TO BREAK UP THE CROWDS UNTIL NEARLY MIDNIGHT WHEN THE RIOT HAD LARGELY RUN ITS COURSE. END SUMMARY.

1. ON JANUARY 10, THE BODY OF PEDRO JOAQUIN CHAMORRO WAS CARRIED

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FROM THE HOSPITAL WHERE HE WAS TAKEN FOLLOWING HIS ASSASSINATION TO HIS HOME ACROSS TOWN BY A CROWD ESTIMATED AT PERHAPS AS MANY AS TEN THOUSAND. ON JANUARY 11, FOLLOWING A NIGHT OF MOURNING, HIS COFFIN WAS CARRIED FROM HIS HOME THROUGH THE STREETS OF MANAGUA TO THE NEWSPAPER PLANT OF LA PRENSA WHICH HE DIRECTED. THE CROWDS WERE AGAIN VERY LARGE. UNLIKE THE FIRST PROCESSION WHICH WAS CHACT-ERIZED BY SOMBER PASSION AND SHOCK THE SECOND CROWD ERUPTED INTO

VENGEFUL VIOLENCE.

2. THE FIRST VIOLENCE APPEARED IN THE EARLY EVENING WHEN THE CROWD WAS ABOUT A MILE FROM LA PRENSA. THE TARGET WAS PLASMAFERISIS S.A., A FIRM WHICH EXPORTED BLOOD PLASMA AND WHICH HAD BEEN THE TARGET OF AN ATTACK BY LA PRENSA AS A CORPORATE VAMPIRE OWNED BY PRESIDENT SOMOZA (REFTEL). THE COMPANY HAD FILED A CALUMNY LAWSUIT AGAINST CHAMORRO. WHETHER THE ATTACK AND SETTING FIRE TO PLASMAFERISIS WAS PLANNED IN ADVANCE OR WAS A SPONTANEOUS REACTION TO AVENGE CHAMORRO'S ASSASSINATION IS UNCLEAR. HOWEVER, PLASMAFERISIS WAS POPULARLY CONSIDERED TO BE A CHAMORRO ENEMY, WAS REPORTEDLY OWNED BY CHAMORRO'S POLITICAL TARGET, PRESIDENT SOMOZA, AND WAS IMPLICATED AT LEAST BY RUMOR IN THE ASSASSINATION. HOWEVER, PLASMAFERISIS WAS ONLY THE FIRST TARGET. THE ADJACENT EL PORVENIR TEXTILE PLANT AND A BRANCH OF THE BANCO DE CENTROAMERICA, BOTH SOMOZA-CONNECTED ENTERPRISES, AND MANAGUA CUSTOMS WERE HIT BY FIRE-BOMB ATTACKS. FIRES DAMAGED MANY MORE STORES, OFFICES, GAS STATIONS AND PLANTS, PERHAPS TALLING AS MANY AS 25 ESTABLISHMENTS. IT IS NOT CLEAR HOW MANY INSTALLATIONS WERE THE TARGET OF DELIBERATE FIRE-BOMBING. A U.S. CITIBANK OFFICE WAS REPORTEDLY AMONG THE INSTALLATIONS BURNED.

3. THERE APPEARED TO HAVE BEEN AN INITIAL ATTEMPT BY WATCHMEN TO DEFEND SOME ENTERPRISES BY FIRING IN THE AIR AND AT LEAST ONE PERSON WAS WOUNDED, BUT VERY RAPIDLY THE CROWD TOOK OVER. FIRE TRUCKS WERE UNABLE TO REACH THE AREA INITIALLY AND THERE WERE NO SIGNS OF THE

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POLICE OR NATIONAL GUARD AT THE SITE OF THE FIRES. DURING THE RIOTING SEVERAL CARS AND AT LEAST ONE BUS WERE OVERTURNED AND BURNED. IT WAS NOT UNTIL ABOUT MIDNIGHT WHEN THE FIRES WERE LARGELY BURNT OUT THAT POLICE AND NATIONAL GUARD PERSONNEL MOVED INTO THE AREA FIRING WEAPONS IN THE AIR AND LAUNCHING TEAR GAS. THE REMAINING RIOTERS RAPIDLY DISPERSED.

4. SOME TEAR GAS WAS THROWN INTO THE INTERIOR GROUNDS OF LA PRENSA WHERE A LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WERE BARRICADED INCLUDING THE CHAMORRO FAMILY AND TWO U.S. PRESS (MIAMI HERALD REPORTER BILL LONG AND AN AP PHOTOGRAPHER). EMBOFF PROVIDED SAFE PASSAGE TO LATTER AND TO LOCAL AP STRINGER OUT OF THE AREA.

5. TODAY, JANUARY 12, THE FUNERAL SERVICE TAKES PLACE AND THERE WILL BE A FURTHER PROCESSION, THIS TIME TO THE CEMETERY. THE FAMILY HAS REVISED PLANS TO TRY TO AVOID THE OPPORTUNITY FOR FURTHER VIOLENCE.

HOWEVER, THE POTENTIAL FOR FURTHER RIOTING EXISTS AS A RESULT OF THIS LAST PROCESSION, THIS EVENING OR BEYOND.

6. THE GON ANNOUNCED LAST NIGHT THAT THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE UNDER DETENTION FOR IMPLICATION IN THE ASSASSINATION OF CHAMORRO HAS

REACHED FOUR. THEIR NAMES HAVE BEEN PUBLICIZED (EMBASSY HAS LIMITED INFO ON ONLY ONE OF THEM) AND A SHOTGUN SAID TO HAVE BEEN USED IN THE ASSASSINATION HAS BEEN RECOVERED, ACCORDING TO THE POLICE, AS WELL AS SEVERAL OTHER WEAPONS AND THREE AUTOS. THE GON HAS ANNOUNCED THAT ONE OF THOSE DETAINED HAS CONFESSED AND IS ATTEMPTING TO CREATE THE IMPRESSION THAT ALL THE ASSASSINS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED. HOWEVER, EVEN IF THIS IS CORRECT THEIR MOTIVE AND CONNECTION HAS STILL NOT BEEN DISCLOSED.

7. IF THE RUMORS OF A PLASMAFERESIS CONNECTION TO THE CHAMORRO ASSASSINATION SHOULD PROVE CORRECT THIS WOULD TAR BOTH PRESIDENT SOMOZA AND HIS CUBAN ASSOCIATES. MANY OF THE FIRM'S SENIOR EMPLOYEES ARE U.S. CITIZENS EXILED FROM CUBA.

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8. FURTHER SPOT REPORTING AND ANALYSIS OF FUTURE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NICARAGUAN POLITICAL SITUATION WILL FOLLOW.
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